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DE RUEHMO #0797/01 0900734
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 310734Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2623
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000797

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [YI](#) [BK](#) [SR](#) [KV](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA MARKS 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATO ACTIONS IN
FRY

REF: BELGRADE 246

Summary

11. (SBU) On March 24, Russia marked the tenth anniversary of NATO's 1999 NATO bombardment of FRY with an official statement, a State Duma special resolution, political rallies, and extensive media coverage. The MFA called for an assessment of NATO's actions and called for the adoption of Medvedev's European Security Treaty proposal. The Duma's special resolution denounced the 1999 air campaign and March 17, 2004 destruction of Serbian sites in Kosovo. The Duma's International relations chair called the actions of the "West" hypocritical and expressed the hope the International Court of Justice would overturn Kosovo's declaration of independence. In highlighting the anniversary, Russian officials and politicians addressed a domestic audience seeking to repudiate the "failures" of the Yeltsin administration with a demonstration of Russia's ability to counter NATO, and addressed the international community by arguing that NATO's actions in 1999 formed part of the basis for Medvedev's European Security Treaty and laid the ground work for Georgia's actions in South Ossetia. End Summary.

Official Statements

12. (U) MFA Spokesman Andrei Nesterenko released a statement on March 24, calling for a "sober assessment" of NATO's actions in 1999. The statement also alleged that "Calls to let sleeping dogs lie that one hears in the West today are caused by one thing only - an urge to shamefacedly hide the blatant violation of the norms of international law that has become obvious, counting on military force and encouraging separatism." He argued that Medvedev's European Security Treaty proposal would "fix" the principles of relations between states in the region.

13. (U) The State Duma adopted a special resolution on March 20, denouncing both NATO's 1999 air campaign and the March 17, 2004 events in Kosovo that led to the alleged destruction of Serbian churches and monasteries, and calling for Kosovo and Metohia to remain part of Serbia until the parties negotiated a settlement. In a statement to the press, Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the Duma Committee on International Affairs, said that "Kosovo separatism had already proved to be a headache for those external sponsors." Arguing that the recognition of Kosovar independence undermined the values the "West" allegedly defends, he expressed the hope that the International Court of Justice would overturn Kosovo's unilateral declaration. Russian media also carried a March 24 interview with Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Koluzin, in which he labeled NATO actions in 1999 as "aggression" and "one of the most

tragic pages in the history book of Europe of the late twentieth century."

Political Rallies

14. (U) On March 24, the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) held a rally at the Serbian Embassy in Moscow "to express solidarity with the Serbian people." LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called the NATO actions "a heinous act" and slammed Russia's 1999 Yeltsin government for not stopping it. Zhirinovskiy added that the current Russian government should help Kosovo return to Serbia, and after the rally the Serbian Embassy invited him to visit.

15. (U) Also on March 24, Communist Party (KPRF) leader Gennadiy Zyuganov called the 1999 NATO actions "the next stage of American globalization." He compared U.S. actions to Hitler's during World War II, saying "Hitler was unable to subdue the Serbs . . . now the Americans tried to repeat it." Echoing Zhironovskiy, Zyuganov explained that the "aggression" was possible because "Russia kept silent."

16. (U) Forty activists of the youth group Nashi also held a small ceremony in front of the Serbian Embassy. The group lit candles to form the number 89, in memory of the eighty-nine children killed during the NATO bombing campaign, and held a moment of silence.

In the Press

17. (SBU) Russian airwaves, in particular, carried extensive
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coverage and editorials on the tenth anniversary, tying it to the August conflict with Georgia by arguing that President Saakashvili used it to "unilaterally" settle the dispute. Duma Deputy and CIS Institute Director Konstantin Zatulin's editorial on the internet-based Regnum called the 1999 airstrikes "a war against Russia, and its attempts to rebuild and revitalize its national dignity." He heaped blame upon the Yeltsin-era government for failing to stand up to the U.S.

18. (SBU) In his statements to the press, former Russian PM Yevgeniy Primakov, argued in favor of Kosovo's partition ("give the north of Kosovo to the Serbs") and of reuniting the Republika Srpska with Serbia. While Primakov's statements are not new and are not GOR policy, they do strike a chord here. At a recent dinner with the Ambassador, State Duma Deputy Andrey Kokoshin and retired general and Chairman of the All Russia Organization of Veterans Mikhail Moiseyev both praised Primakov for "showing spine" (reftel).

Comment

19. (SBU) The GOR's pronouncements and comments from prominent Russian figures on the 1999 bombings were neither surprising nor did they differ from previous statements; however, they came in a crescendo, with the goal of supporting several Russian contentions: the European security architecture was broken and the region must pursue Medvedev's European Security proposal; Kosovo's independence was a dangerous precedent that lead to South Ossetia and Abkhazia; and Russia was resurgent and must be dealt with as an equal. For Russian nationalists, the anniversary was useful political red meat around which their political bases rallied.
BEYRLE